

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8649

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, IS  
SUBJECT: HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL COMMENTS ON GOVERNMENT CRISIS

SUMMARY: AT FAREWELL LUNCHEON WITH AMBASSADOR TOON, HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL STRONGLY SUPPORTED PRIME MINISTER RABIN; EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE LABOR PARTY WOULD BE ABLE TO ADOPT A STRONG PLATFORM ENDORSING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS; AND THOUGH THAT THE RESIGNATION OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE CALL FOR EARLY ELECTIONS, AND THE UP-COMING LABOR PARTY CONVENTION WOULD ALL HELP TO MUTE SOMEWHAT THE INTERNAL CONTROVERSIES OVER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES, AS WELL AS THE STRUGGLE FOR PARTY LEADERSHIP. (END OF SUMMARY)

1. AT A FAREWELL LUNCHEON FOR AMBASSADOR TOON ON DECEMBER 22 HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL YERUHAM MESHEL EXPRESSED HIS SATISFACTION WITH PRIME MINISTER RABIN'S DECISION TO RESIGN AND TO CALL FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. HE THOUGHT THAT RABIN'S FORTHRIGHT DECISION TO DROP THE NRP WOULD STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION; WOULD HELP RALLY THE LABOR PARTY BEHIND HIM; AND WOULD MAKE MORE DIFFICULT PERES' EFFORTS TO WIN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. GOLDA MEIR, LIKE MESHEL, ALSO FAVORED RABIN AS PRIME MINISTER AND HER SUPPORT COULD BE DECISIVE. HE CONSIDERED HER P.F. A FRIEND AND THE PERSON EST  
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QUALIFIED TO LEAD THE LABOR PARTY AND ISRAEL DURING THE NEXT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ARABS.

2. ISRAEL-ARAB NEGOTIATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY WILL AGAIN BE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE OVER WHICH THE ELECTION WILL BE FOUGHT, MESHEL DECLARED. A LABOR PARTY LED BY

RABIN WOULD BE ABLE TO PRESENT THE VOTERS WITH A CLEAR CHOICES, NOW THAT IT NO LONGER HAD TO CONSIDER THE NRP'S POSITION. RABIN AS READY AND ABLE TO NEGOTIATE THE FUTURE STATUS OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA AND WILLING TO MAKE FAR-REACHING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS IN ORDER TO MOVE TOWARD PEACE. IN CONTRAST, THE LIKUD UNDER BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP STANDS FOR RETENTION OF ALL THE TERRITORIES AND REJECTION OF CONCESSIONS TO THE ARABS. IF THE ELECTORATE IS PREPARED TO SUPPORT NEGOTIATIONS, THEN RABIN IS THE CANDIDATE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT ISRAEL WOULD RETURN TO THE 1967 BORDERS, BUT IT WOULD SIGNIFY THE COUNTRY'S READINESS TO RETURN A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF JUDEA AND SAMARIA. ASKED IF RABIN'S PARTY PLATFORM WOULD INCLUDE ACCEPTANCE OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE, MESHEL HEDGED AND SAID THAT THIS QUESTION SHOULD BE DETERMINED AS PART OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS.

3. MESHEL SAID THAT THE FUTURE OF THE ALIGNMENT WOULD DEPEND ON THE OUTCOME OF CURRENT LABOR PARTY-MAPAM NEGOTIATIONS AND LABOR'S PROGRAM REGARDING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS. MAPAM WANTS TO AMEND THE 14POINT AGREEMENT OF 1973, ON WHICH THE ALIGNMENT IS BASED TO CLARIFY THE CONCESSIONS TO BE OFFERED AND PROVIDE FOR DIRECT DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIANS. IT FEELS THAT THROUGH SUCH A CLARIFIED FORMULATION THE ELECTION RESULT WOULD BECOME A CLEAR MANDATE FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT; THIS WOULD OBTAIN THE NEED FOR A PLEBISCITE AT THE END OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AS NOW CALLED FOR UNDER THE ALIGNMENT AGREEMENT. MESHEL WAS INCLINED TO SUPPORT THE MAPAM POSITION AND THOUGHT THAT DIFFERENCES ON SOCIAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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ECONOMIC QUESTIONS WERE LIKELY TO BE SECONDARY IN MAPAM'S DECISION WHETHER TO RENEW THE ALIGNMENT.

4. RESPONDING TO THE AMBASSADOR'S QUESTION ABOUT YADIN'S FUTURE ROLE, MESHEL SAID THAT HE CONSIDERED NEITHER YADIN NOR SHARON AS POTENTIAL PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE BOTH LACKED AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE FOR NEGOTIATING PEACE. WHAT OTHER ROLES THEY MIGHT PLAY IN A FUTURE GOVERNMENT COALITION REMAIN TO BE DETERMINED.

5. MESHEL THOUGHT THAT THE RECENT GOVERNMENT-HISTADRUT CONTROVERSIES OVER AN ECONOMIC PACKAGE DEAL WERE NOT LIKELY TO BE RESOLVED PRIOR TO THE ELECTION. HOWEVER, HE FORESAW A PERIOD PRIOR TO THE ELECTION OF RELATIVELY CALM NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT, DURING WHICH NO MEASURES WOULD BE TAKEN TO WHICH THE HISTADRUT WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED. THE ADVANCING OF THE KNESSET ELECTION HAD BEEN HELPFUL TO THE HISTADRUT BECAUSE IT RESOLVED THE AWKWARD PROB-

LEM OF WHETHER TO HAVE ISTADRUT ELECTIONS BEFORE OR AFTER THE KNESSET ELECTIONS, I.E., WHO SHOULD FIRST TEST THE ELECTORAL STRENGTH OF THE ALIGNMENT. ALTHOUGH NO FIRM DATE HAS YET BEEN SET, HE THOUGHT HISTADRUT ELECTIONS SHOULD BE HELD IN MID-JUNE, ONE MONTH AFTER THE KNESSET ELECTION.

6. TURNING TO PRESS REPORTS THAT GOLDA MEIR HAD CRITICIZED HIM AT A LABOR PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING ON DECEMBER 16 FOR FAILING TO UNDERSTAND ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, MESHEL SAID THAT SHE SEEMED TO BE OUT OF TOUCH WITH DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE HISTADRUT. HE CONTINUED TO ADMIRE HER GREATLY, BUT FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO HER THE SPECIAL POSITION OF THE HISTADRUT. ISRAEL WAS A SMALL COUNTRY IN WHICH EVERYONE FELT EQUAL TO HIS NEIGHBOR. THUS ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES, TAX EVASIONS AND UNEARNED PRIVILEGES WERE STRONGLY RESENTED, ESPECIALLY AT A TIME WHEN EVERYBODY IS BEING ASKED TO MAKE ECONOMIC SACRIFICES. HE HOPED THAT IN A SERIES OF

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PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH MRS. MEIR HE WOULD BE ABLE TO CONVINCE HER THAT HE DID NOT WISH TO MAKE THE LIFE OF THE GOVERNMENT MORE DIFFICULT NOR TO BE DISLOYAL TO THE LABOR PARTY. HE WOULD AGAIN STAND AS LABOR PARTY CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE HISTADRUT BUT, IF THE PARTY WANTED SOMEONE ELSE, THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WAS FREE TO CHOOSE ANOTHER CANDIDATE. HOWEVER HE ADDED THAT IT WOULD BE UNLIKELY THAT THE PARTY WOULD REFUSE TO ENDORSE THE CANDIDATE CHOSEN BY THE ALIGNMENT FACTION OF THE HISTADRUT.

7. COMMENT: MESHEL'S STRONG SUPPORT OF RABIN AND HIS DESIRE TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO THE ARABS DURING THE NEXT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS MAY HAVE LED HIM TO OVERSIMPLIFY THE PROBLEM OF FINDING COMMON GROUND WITH POTENTIAL COALITION PARTNERS AFTER THE ELECTIONS. SUCH PARTNERS ARE BOUND TO DEMAND A VOICE IN THE DECISIONS ON FUTURE TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS.  
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